DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 269 FL 024 708

AUTHOR Marlett, Stephen A.
TITLE Empty Consonants in Root-Medial Position.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 5p.; In: Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session. Volume 41; see FL 024 706.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Consonants; *Language Patterns; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; Morphology (Languages); *Phonology; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS *Seri

ABSTRACT

This analysis of verb morphology in Seri finds evidence that empty consonants occur in root-medial position. Analysis focuses on the parallel conjugation patterns of the verbs for "know" and "give," finding an empty consonant slot in the middle of each. This position is never preceded by a consonant, so it never appears as a geminated consonant, but it appears as a glide or as nothing. A distinction is made between long low vowels and sequences of identical short low vowels. It is noted that the data do not provide any more convincing arguments for empty consonant positions than previously presented, but do help document more of what is possible in language. (MSE)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert
Dooley
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Empty Consonants in Root-medial Position*

Stephen A. Marlett

Evidence is given that empty consonants occur in root-medial position in Seri, which bears on the observation in Broselow 1995 (Skeletal positions and moras) that such had not been described in the literature. This brief work complements an earlier publication (Marlett and Stemberger 1983, Empty consonant positions in Seri) which posited such consonants at the beginning of various verbs.

ED 461 269

1. Introduction

Broselow 1995 notes that "all of [the cases of empty onset slots in stems] involve empty C slots in the initial (never internal) position of a stem" (p. 196). She cites the analysis of Seri found in Marlett and Stemberger 1983, in which verbs with empty consonants in stem-initial position are presented. In this brief note, I present some facts which I believe could be or should be analyzed with root-internal empty slots. These facts contribute more evidence of empty onsets, which Broselow notes are predicted *not* to exist by moraic theory.

2. The verbs *know* and *give*

Two common verbs in Seri are *know* and *give*, which are entirely parallel in their conjugation. Some crucial forms (finite forms are all cited in third person) are:[1]

(1)	*know*	*give*	Morphology[2]
a. Subject Nominalization	kíja	kíjæ	k-i-____
b. Independent Future	isíja	isíjæ	i-si-____
c. Proximal Realis	imíja	imíjæ	i-mi-____
d. Emphatic Realis	iχóa	iχóæ	i-χo-____
e. Dependent Realis	ipóa	ipóæ	i-po-____
f. Distal Realis	ijóa	ijóæ	i-jo-____

* Thanks to Ellen Broselow for her comments on this squib. Any remaining errors are mine alone.

[1] The data are cited here using IPA symbols, although most of the previous literature on the phonology of Seri uses the Americanist tradition. Long vowels are represented with double vowel symbols in this paper, however, reflecting the fact that phonetically a long vowel in Seri is not distinguishable from a series of short identical vowels (rare as the latter may be). Their proper analysis is crucial in Seri, however. Some forms of these verbs were cited in Marlett 1994; unfortunately, a couple of errors appeared in those data.

[2] The formatives presented here are: k (subject nominalizer in active non-negative contexts), i (object marker), si (independent irrealis), mi (proximal realis), χo (emphatic realis), po (dependent irrealis), jo (distal realis), t (neutral realis), m (negative), k (imperative—one of several suppletive allomorphs, and the appropriate one to appear before roots beginning with short low vowels), ʔa (subject nominalizer in passive non-negative contexts), p (passive in pre-vocalic contexts). The *k* that appears in (1h-i) is epenthetic.

Copyright © 1997 by Stephen A. Marlett.

FL024 08
2
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

g.	Neutral Realis	itáa	itææ	i-t-____
h.	Negative Neutral Realis	itkmáa	itkmææ	i-t-m-____
i.	Negative Independent Irrealis	iskmáa	iskmææ	i-s-m-____
j.	Negative Emphatic Realis	iχomáa	iχomææ	i-χo-m-____
k.	Negative Dependent Irrealis	ipomáa	ipomææ	i-po-m-____
l.	Negative Distal Realis	ijomáa	ijomææ	i-jo-m-____
m.	Negative Subject Nominalization	imáa	imææ	i-i-m-____
n.	Imperative	káa	kææ	k-____
o.	Passive Subject Nominalization	ʔapáa	ʔapææ	ʔa-p-____

Marlett 1981 treated these as irregular verbs, with underlying forms {-aa} and {-ææ}, respectively, solely for the reason that the forms in (1a-c) have a palatal glide in them that does not occur in regular verbs. However, they are not anywhere as irregular as other irregular verbs in the language, so that solution seems a bit drastic. I sketch an alternative analysis below which posits underlying forms which contain a root-medial empty slot, analogous to the empty consonant slots posited in Marlett and Stemberger 1983.[3] This is the kind of form which Broselow 1995 notes has not been reported in the literature to date.

3. An empty slot analysis

The analysis that I propose here includes an empty consonant slot in the middle of these verb roots, as shown informally in (2).

(2)

know	V	C	V	*give*	V	C	V
	|		|		|		|
	a		a		æ		æ

This consonant position is never preceded by a consonant, and so it never appears as a geminated consonant, unlike the examples discussed in Marlett and Stemberger 1983. It either appears as a glide (*j*) or it does not surface as anything.[4] The situation which gives rise to the former does not present itself with the verbs discussed in the previous work, and the latter behavior is entirely consistent with the patterns observed in that work.

The analysis for the 'epenthetic' palatal glide is almost self-evident. The features of the *i* are spreading to the empty consonant position, as shown in (3). The rule is structure preserving, however, because no glide appears after a prefixal *o*; Seri does not have a labiovelar glide. The prefixal *i* appears adjacent to the root-medial empty consonant position by means of a rule of short low vowel deletion that is very general in the language, discussed in Marlett and Stemberger 1983, and evident also in forms (1d-f).[5] The rule essentially deletes a (root-initial) short low vowel after another vowel.

---

[3] I have adopted this analysis in more recent work in progress; Marlett 1993 uses {-æCæ} to represent the underlying form of this particular verb for *give*, for example.

[4] The glide is lengthened in this position phonetically, so its presence is not in doubt.

[5] It is possible that the label 'Short Low Vowel Deletion' is misleading. In pre-consonantal position, *o+a* or *o+æ* becomes long *o*, but in pre-vocalic position, *o+a* or *o+æ* becomes short *o*. Perhaps the features of *a* are deleted in both cases, leaving its mora behind generally; the 'compensatory' lengthening which results from the stranded mora is lost in pre-vocalic position, however.

(3)	Underlying Form	V CV VCV | | | | | i p o a a	V CV VCV | | | | | i s i a a	V C VCV | | | | i t a a
	SLV Deletion	V CV CV | | | | i p o a	V CV CV | | | | i s i a	(structural description is not met)
	Spreading	(blocked by Structure Preservation)	V CV CV | | | | i s i a	(structural description is not met)
	Surface Form	ipóa	isíja	itáa

4. Distinguishing between long vowels and vowel sequences

The verbs *know* and *give* behave differently from those which begin with long low vowels. Long vowels always condition the deletion of a prefix vowel, and conjugate very differently from verb roots beginning with short low vowels (Marlett and Stemberger 1983, Marlett 1981). For example, underlying {si-aa} *will be flat* surfaces as [saa] (compare to {si-aCa} *will give*, which is [sija]).

These verbs also behave differently from those which begin with a sequence of identical short low vowels. The latter are not common (and perhaps should not exist at all, by the Obligatory Contour Principle). One verb root which begins with such a sequence is the verb {-aaaɸ} *wear loinstring* (short *a*, followed by long *a*). Likewise, the plural stem of the verb *say to*, {-aaam}, which is related to the singular root {-ai} by an ablaut rule observed in various forms (changing *i* to *aa*), begins with a short low vowel. Such verbs do not have any kind of 'epenthetic' glide in them. In fact, the *i* of a prefix is regularly lowered to [æ] in them when it precedes a low vowel, as shown in (4).

(4)		*wear loinstring*	*say to* (plural subject)
a.	Subject Nominalization	kǽaaɸ	kǽaam
b.	Independent Future	isǽaaɸ	isǽaam
c.	Proximal Realis	imǽaaɸ	imǽaam
d.	Emphatic Realis	iχóaaɸ	iχóaam
e.	Dependent Irrealis	ipóaaɸ	ipóaam
f.	Distal Realis	ijóaaɸ	ijóaam
g.	Neutral Realis	itáaaɸ	itáaam
h.	Negative Neutral Realis	itkmáaaɸ	itkmáaam
i.	Negative Independent Irrealis	iskmáaaɸ	iskmáaam

Choice of suppletive allomorph which depends on vowel length also easily distinguishes short low vowel-initial verb roots from other verbs, as described in Marlett and Stemberger 1983 and Marlett 1981. The empty consonant analysis distinguishes the verbs *know* and *give* from other verbs, and also provides a simple and motivated way to account for their phonological behavior.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have given some evidence to believe that empty consonant positions exist in root-medial positions in Seri. The data do not provide any more convincing arguments for empty consonant positions than previously presented, but they do at least help document more of what is possible in language. One wonders how many other similar cases there are in other 'exotic' (and often endangered) languages of the world. Unfortunately, too few linguists are doing research on too few of these languages, and too little of this research is primary research. This suggests that many of the interesting theoretical proposals that are being made are still relatively untested.

References

Broselow, Ellen. 1995. Skeletal positions and moras. *The handbook of phonological theory*, ed. John A. Goldsmith, pp. 175-205. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

Marlett, Stephen A. 1981. *The structure of Seri*. Doctoral dissertation, University of California at San Diego.

Marlett, Stephen A. 1993. Goals and indirect objects in Seri. *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session* 37:1-20.

Marlett, Stephen A. 1994. Seri vowels and the Obligatory Contour Principle. *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session* 38:117-118.

Marlett, Stephen A. and Joseph P. Stemberger. 1983. Empty consonants in Seri. *Linguistic Inquiry* 14:617-639.

Steve Marlett
PO Box 8987
Catalina, AZ 85738-0987
U.S.A.

steve_marlett@sil.org